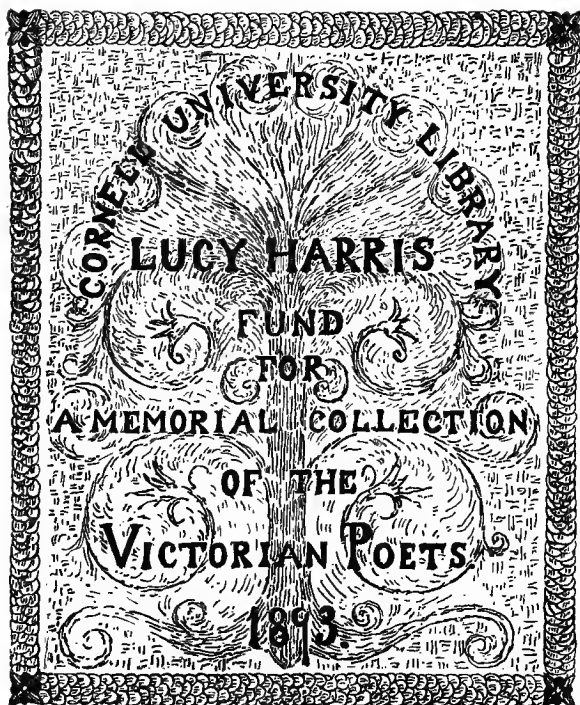


Gladys the Singer

BY

ERIC MACKAY



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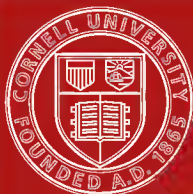
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GLADYS THE SINGER

AND OTHER POEMS.

BY

(George) ERIC MACKAY,

AUTHOR OF "LOVE LETTERS OF A VIOLINIST."



LONDON:

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TO

ROBERT BROWNING,

POET, SEER, PHILOSOPHER.

I knew thee first as one may know the fame
Of some apostle, as a man may know
The mid-day sun far-shining o'er the snow.
I hail'd thee prince of poets ! I became
Vassal of thine, and warm'd me at the flame
Of thy pure thought, my spirit all aglow
With dreams of peace, and pomp, and lyric show,
And all the splendors, Browning ! of thy name.
But now, a man reveal'd, a guide for men,
I see thy face, I clasp thee by the hand ;
And though the Muses in thy presence stand,
There's room for me to loiter in thy ken.
O lordly soul ! O wizard of the pen !
What news from God ? What word from Fairyland ?

GLADYS THE SINGER.



Canto first.

YE who have known the pangs of much delight,
The joys of sorrow, and the ravish'd sight
Of some enthrallment in a woman's shape,
Ye who have known the wondrous wild escape
Of heyday thoughts,—accept me of your kin !
I, too, have lov'd ; I, too, have joy'd therein ;
I, too, have pray'd and sigh'd,—as ye have
sigh'd,—

And sought the Wisdom which is near allied
To Folly's self.—Far off I hear ye weep,
I see your smiles, I note the things you keep,

The hoarded nothings of a perish'd year,—
A faded rose,—a ringlet passion-dear,—
All these I see ; and, while I muse thereon,
I think of those sweet souls beyond the dawn
Whose love was flame. O deathless ! O ye dead !
Are ye well met ? Have ye no tears to shed,
Not e'en for joy ? Is love not worth a kiss
Up there in Heaven ? A mere seraphic bliss,
Fit for a saint ? God help us then each one !
And you, my brothers,—you, this side the sun,
Who love true-love,—believe this much of me,
That I have worshipp'd Love upon my knee
And almost fear'd it. I have trembled there
For sheer delight ! A glove,—a ribbon fair,—
Have moved me strangely ; and in lonely hours,
In empty chambers, and in starlit bowers,
I have been blest. Have you enthroned a Grief
And paid it homage ? Have you found relief
In tears and dreams, as I full oft have done,
And not been impious ? earn'd a benison

And not been proud?—I claim you, here to-night,
Friends of these lovers twain, of whom I write,
That you may see them, in their smiles and tears,
A-down the depths of non-returning years.

In days gone by there stood, beside the sea,
A lofty tower, which loom'd across the lea,
Far-seen for miles ; and, in the glade below,
A rustic dwelling fit for those to know
Who love seclusion. 'Twas a peaceful nook
Meet for Apollo when, with pipe and crook,
He wooed Acantha ; and within its walls
One was safe shelter'd whom a Legend calls
Gladys the Singer,—one of those elect
And fond, fair women whom the world has deck'd
But will not honor.

He who own'd the tower
Was young and wild, and knew that lonesome bower,
Knew it too well, aye ! knew it as the kite

May know the dove-cot ; and a-down the height
He strode one day, one lustrous autumn-day,
Brain-sick with fancies such as warp the sway
Of Eros' children ; and his steps he turn'd
To where the cottage stood amid the burn'd
And withering foliage. But, beside the same,
He paus'd in doubt ; and, with a kindling shame,
Half glad, half sad, he heard a matin song
Sung, as it seem'd, by One who did belong
To angel-choirs. And, as he drain'd the draught
Of that sweet voice,—as soul and body quaff'd
The nectarous notes,—a something from his eyes
Fell like a film, and all the earth and skies
And all the frondage of the forest way
Re-took the raptures of the month of May.
He roam'd, in thought, once more beside the stream
Where she had led him,—where the golden gleam
Of her bright hair had crown'd the tender grace
Of her lithe body, and her matchless face
Had made him mad ! And once again he stood

Alone with her in Heaven, and found it good,
Found it the one sweet thing of all things known,
To sit with her at twilight, all alone,
In halcyon spots,—the universe their own.
A bowery nook, a sea-side lonely cave,
These were his Heaven, and more he did not crave !
But now he tarried near the very shrine
Of this lov'd soul, and heard her voice divine
Peal out supreme.—He open'd with a smile
The querulous door, and stood, a breathing-while,
Straight in her sight.

She rush'd into his arms
Tear-lit with joy, and glowing in the charms
Of white surrender : “O my Love ! my Love !
So true, so gentle, so insured above
All time and distance ! I have yearn'd for thee
As earth for summer, as the lonely sea
For midnight stars ; and now thou'rt here at last,
I mean to cling to thee, and hold thee fast,
Ay ! as a chain might do, I mean to cling

Fast round thy soul, and sphere thee like a ring.
What ! not one word ? And gloomy, too, and chill,
On this bright day ? O Rupert ! thou art ill,
And wilt not tell me ! Thou'rt convulsion-pale,
And in thy gaze I read the dismal tale
Of some foreboding. O my dearest one !
My life, my death, my All beneath the sun !
In God's good name I charge thee make it clear
What makes thee sad ? If thou require a tear
Seek it in me,—for I have learnt the way
To shed more tears than thou wilt need to-day."

"Nay, Gladys, nay !" with smiles he answer'd her,
"'Tis much ; 'tis nothing ! Some unwonted stir
In household matters.—Words are empty things.
Why should they hurt ? If Faithfulness had wings
'Twould quit me now ; 'tis here, and thou art She.
Nay, sit thee down, and I will yield to thee
My sure confession ; and as thou art true
Thou wilt absolve me with thine eyes of blue
Ere all be said."

That other with a look
Half frown, half smile, obey'd him ; yet she shook
As shakes an aspen when the winds are hush'd,
And all the meadow-lands are sunset-flushed.
And he ? Remorse was with him ; and apart
He stood absorb'd. Should he consult his heart ?
Or serve ambition ? He had won the soul
Of this sweet woman, and to his control
His words had sway'd her.—Should he put to sc
The threats and frets and sneers which, all the mo
Had marr'd his peace ? Aye ! should he, as a knight
In olden time had done for his delight,
Accept, revere, enshrine, and re-endow
This blue-eyed wonder with his marriage-vow ?
He still'd a sigh, and turn'd to her, and spake :—
“ Thou know'st, O Gladys ! for thine honor's sake,
And for thyself that art as Heaven to me,
I would not break the oath which unto thee
My lips have sworn. But I, too long I fear,
Have stood between thy life and that career

Which waits for thee, as Silence in the dales
Waits, after dark, for songs of nightingales !
I should have warn'd thee. In my heart I knew
That tedious hours, and sorrows, not a few,
Would be thy meed, if here thou didst prolong
Thy tell-tale absence from the world of song."

She heard abash'd. Was he indeed possess'd
Of foregone knowledge, though so late confess'd ?
Or was he wearied of their sylvan bliss ?
She mused an instant in the fear of this ;
And then, without a sign, she droop'd her head
And wept outright,—such tears as children shed
When, 'mid a storm, they hear their parents pray.

Women are stronger than we care to say,
And when they weep they conquer more than men
With sword or sceptre ; and they bind us then
With weak, warm hands, as with a festal wreath.
Let those who draw the sword from out its sheath,
And those who sit and stare on gilded thrones,
Beware of Woman ! She, in all the zones

And all the courts of earth, and all its bowers,
Is queen elect of all the golden hours.
She is the ruler whom the rulers know,
And when she wills a thing, in joy or woe,
In health or sickness, or remorse or sin,
The valiant soul must bow to her therein.
'Twas so to-day when, with a mute caress,
She spake her trust, and, clothed in comeliness,
Made known her fears,—and this with such a mi
And such sweet fervor, and so bright a sheen
Of pout and blush, that, for a moment's space,
He gazed, relenting, on her radiant face,
And loath'd himself; and trembled at her glance,
And vow'd to God that his was evil chance
To do this thing, and in his very shame
To fear to name it, though in Reason's name.—
He knelt beside her; and he seiz'd her hand
In his two palms, and, with contrition, scann'd
Her amorous eyes, the brighter for the rush
Of those quick tears; then kiss'd away the blush

That warm'd her cheek as with a rose's stain,
And, prompt, re-kiss'd it to its place again.
So weak she seem'd, and yet so strong withal,
And so unyielding, that, within her thrall,
Man as he was, he felt the force in him
Melt into misery, and a tear bedim
His love-lorn gaze ; for he was one of those
Who fear the scorn of maidens more than blows ;
And fain was he, e'en now, to mend his speech,
And coax and flatter, and, in part, beseech
Some word of pardon.

But a woman's eyes
Are quick to see through every base disguise ;
And she could mark the menace and the drift
Of thoughts unspoken, and her soul could sift
Sound from the sense thereof ; and thus she spake :
“ O Rupert ! O my Master ! for thy sake
I have been stabb'd by doubts and lain awake
Night after night, to dream of foolish things,—
A moth's lament, a flower with folded wings,

An April daisy turn'd into a screen
For elfin lovers, and the face serene
Of my dead sister, who, though like to me
As flakes of snow are like the foam at sea,
Would thrust me back, full soon, could she behold
My fall'n estate, and all my promise-gold
Turn'd into dust,—I mean the pride I had
In mine own self, ere doting made me mad.
Ah, gracious God ! how glad were I to pass,
Young as I am, beneath the churchyard grass,
If, but an instant, ere I went that way,
I might re-win the right I had to pray !”

But he, soft-smiling, gazed on her, and stood
Silent apace, as one, within a wood,
Haunted by pixies at the swooning-hour
Of birds and bushes, when the moon has power.
As one entranced, who, ere the night is done,
May note the world's betrothal to the sun ;
E'en so he watch'd her, with a pent-up sigh,
And thus address'd her :—“Thou'rt too young to die,

And much too fair. Who knows it more than thou?
Nay, hear me, Gladys ! for I lie not now,
Nor have I lied to thee at any time,
Or wrong'd in thought the holy wedding chime,
Or spurn'd an oath; or fear'd a promise-ring.
No ! I have thought no lie, nor would I bring
Sorrow to thee or shame, or make thee rue
The rapt confession of thine eyes of blue,
When first I saw thee in the long-ago
Of this year's May,—as blameless as the snow
Which falls in winter, at a mountain's base.
Beauty is thine, and Music, and the race
For power and wealth, and all the joys of fame,
And all the rhapsodies that round a name
Burst into splendor, and possess a world !
Glory is thine ; and, on thy lips impearl'd,
A smile so sweet, so lustrous in its mirth,
That none hath known till now, upon the earth,
A dream so true, a joy so fair to see."

" A dream,—a joy ? Ah, thou canst flatter me ! "

She rippled forth, in answer to his speech,
"But I am here, to hide me, out of reach,
If thou upbraid me,—as I know thou wilt,—
For too much love,—itself a kind of guilt.
Am I attaint, or guiltless in thy sight,
For my long trust?"

He answered her aright :—

"I am not worthy of so proud a boon
As thy great love ; for not the sun and moon,
And not the stars, in all their course, have known
Such gem-like joy ; and I would fain atone,
If thou permit me, by a prompt assent
To all thy dreams,—and Art's aggrandisement ;
Aye ! have thee robed, and see thee crown'd again,
As Music's Queen, return'd to her domain."

"Music's domain?" she cried. "Nay, that is done.
But lo ! I love thee as a kneeling nun
Loves, in the circuit of her little cell,
The pictured face of Christ who conquer'd Hell.
E'en so I love thee, Sweetheart ! and I swear,

By God's own mouth, and by His auburn hair,
That I will slay thee if thou'rt false to me!"

This said, she 'flush'd as red as roses be
And sprang to him, and kiss'd him on the throat.
Thus might a panther, with a tawny coat,
Spring at a stag, whom Death has brought to bay.
But Life was here, not Death, and in its sway
The strong man bow'd, as when the knotted oak
Bows to the storm; and over him there broke
The wild, weak utterance of a quavering voice.
"Rupert!" it cried, "O Rupert! O my Choice!
Sorrow be mine, not thine, if I offend.
It seems I vex thee. Shall I make an end,
Here, in this place, with this thy jewell'd knife,
At once of loving and of loveless life?
Winter is wild. The storm may want a wife.
And I am friendless as a foundering ship.
The hours recoil. The monstrous moments slip
Fast through my fingers, while I count the beads
Of my poor life,—the rosary of my deeds

Good, bad, and selfish, and the joy therein
Which oft I found, undaunted by the sin,—
If sin it be,—which brought me to thy side.
I lov'd thee, Rupert ! as, at eventide,
The lowly daisy, in her hood of green,
Loves the set sun, and keeps her face unseen
Through all the drowsy hours of sainted night,
Till dawn restores the Lov'd One to her sight.
Oh ! I can drown, or, like a broken lyre,
Be thrown to earth, or cast upon a fire.
I can be made to feel the pangs of death,
And yet be constant to the quest of breath,—
Our poor, pale trick of living through the lies
We name Existence, when that 'something' dies
Which we call Honor. Many and many a way
Can I be struck, or fretted, night and day,
In some new fashion, or condemn'd the while
To take for food the semblance of a smile,
The left-off rapture of a slain caress,
And 'Yes' for 'No,' and 'No' perchance for 'Yes.'

Ah ! well I see, of comfort there is none,
And no completion of the faith begun,
When moon and star, and swift-ascending sun,
Brought joy to me, and made me, as I wis,
The thing I am, soul-famish'd for a kiss."
He rais'd her hand, and kiss'd it, as a king,
For some cold vow, may do so staid a thing.
But as he kiss'd her,—careful as the snow
Which falls on flowers,—she frown'd, and murmur'd
low :—

" Too kind,—good Sir ! " and dashed away a tear,
And waved him back, as mindful to appear
Nor grave nor gay, nor coy, nor over-kind ;
And, far away, the wailing autumn wind
Sobb'd o'er the sea, alone and unconfined,
Like some poor lover whom the nights and days
Have robb'd alike of triumph and of praise.

" O friend ! " he answer'd, " I am much to blame.
I taught thee this. I taught thee how to name
Sorrow and sin and suffering ; and for thee
I brought myself to sue on bended knee

To my proud sire. His answer wouldst thou guess,
His rude retort, his smile of bitterness ?
He curs'd thee, Gladys ! and he told me then,
In that rough hour, that shameful unto men
My ways had grown ; and bade me, as I fear'd
Death and dishonor for a name revered,
To break with thee,—as winter breaks with spring,
And night with day, and Nature with the thing
She most hath treasured."

With a frown she drew
A hot, quick breath, and look'd him through and
through,

And then replied :—" I gave thee all I had,—
My youth, my truth, my life, and all things glad,
All thoughts of love, all hopes of peace to come,
And only kept away my sorrows' sum,—
My tears, and fears, and sighs, and all the shame
That burnt the bays of what I deem'd my fame.
If still remember'd in the world of men,
If honor'd still beyond this desert-glen
Where now we meet, I care not. I am dead

To all delights with which my soul I fed,
And all ambitions in the realm of art,
And all the fond desires that were a part
Of my young life, before I came to thee."

"What need," he answer'd, "here beside the sea,
Where Art and Nature have the world for friend,
What need, I say, of tears that come to end
Full soon for all men,—and for women first?
What need hast thou for rancour, or for thirst
Of things withheld unkindly,—who shall say!—
Or hid from sight, or haply kept away
For some just purpose?" And he bent his head
And moved his lips, and, with a word unsaid,
Look'd straight at her.

"O God!" she stammer'd out,
"Can such things be? Nay, Sir, beyond a doubt,
You men are just; but, by your tardy leave,
We women, too, may learn, while we deceive,
To preach like you!—'Twas Adam tempted Eve!
He bade her eat. He tempted her to fall,

And then denounced her ! ” And, with this recall
Of her past life, she lifted up her face,
As one who sees a snake a-near the place
She thought secure ; and flash'd a proud disdain
On his mute wonder and the look of pain
With which he eyed her ; and she spake again :—
“ Men have their rights, I know, and thou hast thine,
To break the bowl, and squander all the wine !
But tell me, quick, thy father's final word,
And what, in shame, to-day thine ears have heard ? ”

His faltering lips made answer to her quest :—
“ He was unjust, and stern, and ill at rest,
But clear, emphatic, certain of his power.
‘ Thou must dismiss,’ he said, ‘ this very hour,
All thoughts of love till I permit the same.’
And, with a cold aspersion on thy fame,
He wrung my heart with words I will not name.”

Sudden as fire she started to her feet :
“ And thou ? ” she cried, “ Thine answer to the heat
Of this distemper ? ” Like a craven man

He hung his head, and blush'd as he began
Some stuttering words. "I am controll'd," he said,
"By claims of kindred, which the quick and dead
Alike have bow'd to. For my father's sake,
For mine and his, I must at once partake
Of his fell purpose, and restore thy troth,
And claim of thee mine own mistaken oath,
This, and no less."

"No less?" she swift replied.

"This,—and no less? Well, well, I must have died
Some time to-day! I must have met my death
Some minutes since, or, with thy cruel breath,
Thou hadst not dared to slander so my corse,
And rack my soul with word of this divorce.
But leave me quickly, for the dead are proud,
And murder'd oaths are safest in a shroud.
I hate thee, Rupert! and my hate is such
I would not soil my finger with a touch
Of thy white body, though to touch it now
Made me an Empress. O thou traitor, thou!

Traitor to me and mine,—if mine there be
In days hereafter,—O thou sad-to-see,
And dark and dread pale spectre of the thing
I lov'd and fear'd and reverenced as a king !
Nay, I have eyes. I see thee. I can trace
The coward blush that lurks about thy face,
And fears its colour,—fears to show itself,
Lest it should wear the livid look of pelf,
Or mark thy cheek with some detested blot.
I know thy purpose, though thou tell it not :—
To wed hereafter, for Ambition's sake,
A high-born dame with gold enough to slake
Thy thirst of power."

He made a quick retort :

"No bride for me,—in good or ill report,—
In all the round of all my nights and days."
But with a withering look she met his gaze,
As she would stab him with that very knife
Whereof she spake, ere yet a word of strife
Had sprung between them ; and she raised her head

And flash'd contempt. "Thou art some serf," she said,

"Stol'n in the night from some marauder's shed,
And made to take the place,—a place belied,—
Of son and heir,—a castle's foolish pride.
But One who knows all things beneath the sun
Hath frown'd on thee, and sees what thou hast done ;
And all thy heart is bared to Him to-day,
And all thou say'st,—and all thou still wouldst say."

She paus'd an instant with a weary thought
That he might scatter all her doubts to nought,—
All her distress, and all the throbs of pain
That work'd within her ; and she spake again :—
" O thou dried soul whom long I deem'd a man,
Monarch of men, and mine for all the span
Of all our lives, in this world and the next,
O thou weak boaster of a brainless text,
Fitter to fill a trench than be the curse
Of one more summer, or to move me worse
Than now thou mov'st me ! Nay, I hate thee not.
Who hates the worm ? Who hates the canker-blot

On some poor tree ? I see thee as thou art.
I sound thy depths. I read thee to the heart.
I find thee shallow as a clamorous rill
That wends its way, uncall'd for, down a hill !”

As thus she spake, his face from white to red,
And red to white, as of a man half dead,
Grew famine-featured while he look'd at her,
And own'd the mastery, and the fretful spur
Of her keen anger ; and was nigh to sue
For absolution, as his passion due.
But, like a standard-pole whose flag is down,
Or like the base usurper of a crown,
He stood erect, and, for a pulse's beat,
Eyed her askance, as one who would retreat
In some sleek way, if, ere proceeding thence,
He might be pardon'd for his life's offence.

“One word !” she answer'd to his mute appeal,
“One further word !” And then, as she would
reel,
Or swoon, or die, or do some deadly thing,
She clutch'd the air, as men at sea may cling,

Wreck'd as they are, to some unsightly rope.
She ached towards him with a kind of hope,
And then dismiss'd it, and in accents weak,
And tears held back, continued thus to speak :—

“ Thou know'st all women well,—thou oft hast
said ;

Thou know'st not *me*. Go, know thyself instead,—
What man thou art, how false and how unjust
To Nature's test, and Knighthood's holy trust.
I lov'd thee not ! I lov'd a foolish dream
That look'd like thee. I saw thee in the gleam
Of some wild thought, and deem'd thee such an one
As minstrels sing of, when they drape the sun,
And make him Man, and crown him with a crown !
Thou wast the flower of all the world's renown
In my glad sight ; but now, to see thee there,
I seem to see the wraith of some despair,—
A thing so rude, so robber-like in plan,
I would not have thee for my serving-man !
Aye, aye, 'tis so !—I swear by God's delight
When with His hand He parted day and night,

And by the stars, and by the saints of heaven,
That I repent me of my girlhood given
To thee in forfeit ! I repent me well
Of that dark hour which caught me in the spell
Of some dead witch ; for, if report be true,
She built the grot, whose memory I must rue
While life endures,—the cave wherein we met
That doomful day. All evil thee beset,
Thou blight of morning ! All remorse and shame
Possess thy soul, and sap the ancient fame
Of thy great house ! I was too frail a thing,
Too quickly won,—too impotent to sting,—
A fair-hair'd frailty with attractive eyes,—
A doll,—a puppet,—something from the skies
For thy caressing, and belike in time
For thy denouncing, as a minute's crime
Done up in silk ! But should'st thou, for thy
peace,—
If peace it be,—should'st thou, ere autumn cease,
Require a toy, a heart to play withal,
An unwed wife to answer to thy call,—

Say I was proud, and spurn'd thee from my
side ;

Say that the love between us snapp'd and died,
As dies a tune, as snaps the strained chord
Of some wild harp,—too weak to be restored.
Nay ! say this, too : I claim no part in thee,
For I would liefer trust a wave at sea,
A pent-up fire, a raging famish'd bear,
Than thy false heart !—I lov'd thy raven hair ;
I hate it now. I lov'd thy hand so white,
Thy face, thy form,—thy flattery, day and night,—
And thy dark eyes and alabaster brow ;
Be God my witness how I hate them now !”

He stood transfix'd ; he quiver'd as he heard.
He made as he would speak some ruffian word,
Some word uncased by torture from his soul,
Beyond the boundaries of his blood's control.
But with a groan he conquer'd this intent,
And smiled on her, as some reflex is sent
From westward skies, at waning of the day,
When winds of winter spurn the clouds away.

“Let us be friends,” he urged, with lifted head,
“For Love’s sweet sake, for Love that was not dead
That night in June,—for Love that lured us on
To deeds that wreck’d us on the shores of dawn,—
E’en for that love, I say, be generous now,
And grant some liking, though the Fates allow
Small time for rapture. Say ! shall this be done,
And we forget the dream that made us One ? ”

She shrill’d an answer, as, in ancient days,
Cassandra, lovely but with eyes ablaze,
Pour’d out her accents to the sons of Troy ;
And as he heard that answer’s dark alloy
Of taunt and scorn, he launch’d a fearful word
Which clove in twain her spirit as she heard.

“Hence ! Quit my sight ! ” she cried, as with her
palm

She waved him back,—white-heated in her calm,
As some sweet lady whom a boor has vex’d,—
“Away,—thou clown ! ”

One moment, and the next,
He stood aloof ; and then, with half a stare,

And half a scowl, out-saunter'd in the air.
"She must be mad," he thought; and, slow, retraced
His measured steps, athwart the shingly waste.
But she leapt forward, like a stricken deer,
With one great cry, brow-beaten in her fear,
And yet transform'd to something half divine.
For Love had torn the darkness for a sign,
And, sharp within her soul, a something stirr'd
Like wounded wings of some imprison'd bird.

"Come back!" she call'd, as open wide she flung
The lattice-window, where the roses hung
In crumpled wreaths, "Come back and learn from
me

What no man knows,—what haply unto thee
May bring content." But, shuddering on the air
The wild cry fell; and through her golden hair
Her face look'd out, as, on a winter's night,
The icy moon looks down through vapours white.
"Come back!" she call'd to that retreating form
Which heard her not; and weird, and wan, and warm,
She craned her neck to note the path he took,

And sway'd herself, as sways beside a brook
A lonely willow on a breathless day ;
And with her lips she made as she would say :—
“ I was thy faithful wife, though wed in sport
As wives were wedded once in Arthur's court.
Yet heed my plea ! Two hearts are knit in one
In my poor frame.”

But utterance found she none ;
For, ere ecstatic she could shape the words,
And waft them forth as Summer wafts the birds,
For joy, for memory, or for grief's control,
Her face convuls'd, and o'er her tottering soul
The storm-cloud burst ; and tears shut out the light.

“ O God ! ” she cried, impetuous, pallor-bright,
With thoughts full dark, “ O Saviour ! give me
strength,

Here where I bend, to turn to Thee at length
As my Redeemer, though unfit to kneel,
Unfit to pray, unfit to make appeal
For hope, or mercy, where Thine angels are.”
And, rising feebly from the lattice-bar,

She stood erect,—and harden'd from the shock,—
As though Despair had changed her into rock.

But, later on, the breezes told the flowers
How One who must have wept for many hours
Fled through the wood. It was some sprite, they
said,—

A nymph,—a naïad,—One who, as she fled,
O'er-ruled her grief, and watch'd, with aching sight,
The blood-red moon go down into the night.

Canto Second.

AGAIN the spring-time with its songs of love
Had come and gone; again the cooing dove
Had dropp'd its plumes in moulting; and the
wren

Had rais'd anew its arbor in the glen,—
Its dome-like nest, whereof the wondering
breeze

Had late espied the threshold through the trees.
Again the waves of the advancing seas
Had storm'd the coast with shouts of loud
acclaim,

What time the winter-wind, in ocean's name,
Had hurl'd defiance; and the queen of heaven,

The maiden-moon, entranced or in a swoon,
Had paced the sky, from autumn unto spring,
Unclaim'd of men, uncrown'd of any king,
And only lov'd aright by loveless maids.
And once again the rapture of the glades,—
The rout and revel of the spring-decades,—
Had fill'd and thrill'd the air with such delight
As makes a tourney of the day and night
When gale confronts with gale at equinox,
And all the cliffs, and all the seaward rocks
Have thuds of joy! Again the forest yearn'd
For sight of summer, and the roses burn'd
On many a hedge, whereon the mounting sun
Had flung his trophies; for the world had won
Full right to cling thereto, as—for a feast—
The crown'd Apollo leapt from out the East.
Earth and the sky had call'd him; and the land
Had smiled, expectant; and the ocean-strand
Had bared her bosom to his proud caress;
And wind and wave had counted tress on tress

Of his long hair, and made a chant thereof
Warm, aye ! and wanton as the songs of love
Which sybils sing. And now the breezes crept
From rock to rock, where over-night had slept
A white sea-fog, and where, in summer days,
The blue hare-bell would sound the Maker's praise
In silvery chimes, unheard but guess'd aright
By wandering bards. The hill was all alight
With blazing furze, that keeps the sun in sight,
And seems to thrill with sunshine after dark ;
And, far away, the lilting of the lark,
The prophet-bird, the singer of the dawn,
Invested Heaven, as if its mate had gone
Straight through the sky, and must be ravish'd back.

And lo ! dishevell'd, on the upland track,
A weary woman with a load of joy :—
A Phœban gift,—a bright-eyed baby-boy,
With clustering curls disorder'd on its brow
As dark as midnight, when the skies allow
Stars to be seen,—a lustrous, laughing thing

With dimpled cheeks, and glamour of the spring
All o'er its face ! And she who bore the child
Was fair and comely, though with something wild
In her blue eyes, and something in her gait
That spoke of watchfulness endured of late,
As if the ghost of terror had pursued
Her faltering steps, and agony, at feud
With fairer things, had sapp'd within her mind
The girlish thoughts which link'd her to her kind.

“ Here let us rest,” she cried, as on a knoll
She bent her down, “ and I will ease my soul
Of half its weight, and ease my body, too,
Of its fond burden. For I tell thee true,
Mine own sweet babe ! that, in this heart of mine,
Are tears unnumber'd, sharper than the brine
Of salt sea-winds, and fiercer than the flames
Of twenty fires ; and there are bitter names,—
If I could find them,—for my many blames.
But I will tell thee all I know of thee,
And how thy mother met, beside the sea,

A lordly mate, who look'd a king of men,
Or something more :—a Nimrod of the glen,
Half saint, half sinner, with a sinner's smile,
A saint's caress, to capture and beguile.—
Dost see, my Rupert ! yonder on the ridge,
This side the forest, near the broken bridge,
That princely tower ? The keys thereof are thine,
The flag that waves so high is thine and mine,
Yea, all the landscape, from the frothing beach,
Is mine and thine ; as far as eye can reach,
East, west, and north,—all ours,—the shining land
All ours for ever, if we lift a hand.
But shall we lift it ? Shall we make appeal
To God the Father for the future weal
Of one who hates us,—who, beyond his pelf,
Hath nought to love, or pray for, but himself ?”

While thus she parley'd with the tender elf
Who call'd her “Mother,” and was all she had
This side eternity, to keep her glad,
Shudders oppress'd her, and there came a sound

Of leaves and twigs in ear-shot of the mound
Where she was throned. And lo! towards her came
A faggot-woman, old and cold and lame,
Who seem'd the ghost of some dead winter's day
Return'd to life, to lead the world astray.
An instant thought ran riot in her brain,
That she would do a deed of loss, or gain,
Or dole, or mercy, as the hour might teach,
And bring her lover to a secret speech
With this white crone, and lure him to the beach
By talk of gold, or treasure, or what not.

. For yesternight a weird, unhappy plot
Had marr'd her sleep, and prompted her to make
A last bequest,—a Will, which made her quake
Only to think on't. And the tool she sought
Was close at hand ; as close as evil thought
To souls accurst ! The beldam look'd at her,
And snarl'd, aggressive, as a famish'd cur
That sniffs its prey. “ Wilt do a deed for me,”
The girl inquired, “ and earn a golden fee

This happy morn ? I see thou wilt do this ;
For thou art pleased, as when a dream of bliss
Comes to a child. Aye ! aye ! the world is sad.
I know it well ! But gold will make it glad."
With this she tore a leaflet from a book,
And wrote as follows,—and her bosom shook
With untold fears :—

“ If thou remember now
A broken heart,—a broken, foolish vow,—
A poor, pale ghost who, in the years gone by,
Was known as Gladys,—quit thy turret high,
And seek, this day, the place thou knowest well :
The Witches' Cave, the ante-room of Hell,—
If Heaven and Hell be one thing and the same,
And hope a snare, and misery but a name !
I have a lustrous jewel here with me
Which bears thy mark ; a thing so fair to see
That many a wealthy man would sell for this
All things he hath, and all his chance of bliss
In far-off worlds. And yet, oh ! read me right,

And heed me well. This is no fool's delight,
And no poor treasure from the marts of men,
That now I speak of; for a poet's pen,
A painter's brush, a sculptor's art divine,
Alone were fit to vaunt this gem of mine.
A rapturous burst of music at a shrine
Might make it clear; and earth would understand!
But I must place it in a surer hand
Than this I write with; and I pray thee now,
If thou remember still a midnight vow
Which once was thine,—which God and I alone
Heard thee pronounce, albeit in under-tone,—
Come with this dame; but come as comes a
man
Who clears a path for Cæsar in the van
Of utmost truth."

When she the scrip had tied,
And kiss'd it fondly,—and 'twas done with pride,
As one, in prayer, may kiss a holy thing,—
She smiled a smile as gentle as the Spring
Bestows on Winter when the year is young,

And thus address'd, with her persuading tongue,
That aged crone :—" Go, take with thee, I pray,
This scrip I give thee, and in haste convey
To yonder height. The master of the land
Is great and courteous, with a princely hand ;
And scarce an hour ago I saw him pass
Home to his towers, across the shuddering grass
There on the cliff. Go, tell him I am here,
And bring him where the sea-weed sad and sere
Thrills to the blast, and hisses to the sea :—
But make no further talk of mine or me,
Save this alone :—Thou'st seen me on my way
To find a cavern where, from day to day,
Strange things were plann'd. He knows what I
would say!

Hence, then, and quickly ; and return with him."

The ancient woman, cold in every limb
And twitch'd by palsy, with a croaking laugh,
Made mouths at her, and fumbled with her staff,
And talk'd of God ! The world is full of such :—
Women and men, unseemly to the touch,

Unkempt, uncanny, girt about with woe,
And smirch'd with mud, who yet are proud to know
Some far-off Duke, who threatens them with a rod
And claims their toil ; and so she talk'd of God !—
With tottering steps, and smile of winter-cheer,
She went her way, with what might seem a tear
In her dull'd eyes ; and once again the boy,
Who play'd, low-crooning, with a broken toy,
Was all-in-all to that adoring face :—
A youthful mother's with a naïad's grace,
Who wore the crownlet of her golden hair !—

But when she'd watch'd the beldam by the glare
Of that fierce sun, up-toil, with tottering care,
The burnt-up path, she caught the radiant child
Quick in her arms, and sang to it, and smiled,
And kiss'd and worshipp'd it, and made it gay
With meadow-flowers, and mosses silver-gray,
And call'd it "King," and "Sweetheart," and was fain
To crown its brows, and kiss its lips again
A thousand times, and tell it how she knew

That he, as son and heir, would have his due,
Though now denied it, and he smiled upon
By rich and poor,—and win their benison.
And he whose eyes in rapture seem'd to float
Caught up the chain that hung about her throat,
And toy'd therewith, and seiz'd, and open'd wide,
The golden trinket, where a face of pride
Look'd out in smiles, as faces in a dream
Invest the darkness and absorb the beam
Of some set sun ; and thus that woman fair
Resumed her talk, and covered with her hair
The baby-face which look'd into her own :—
“ He is thy father, child ! though all unknown,
Thine unkind father who, in summers flown,
Made me his plaything and a gibe of men.
He called me Philomel ; and gladly then
Offer'd me marriage. I was Philomel
For half a summer ; and he lov'd me well,—
Or said he lov'd me ! Will he make thee great,
And treat thee as a lord of high estate,

Or mar thy life, as children break a toy ?—
There, there, my Rupert ! Hush, my darling boy !
I did but jest. My tears are foolish ones.
All hopes are sound ; all fathers love their sons.
And thine will love thee when he comes to-day
And scans thy face,—while mine is far away !”

These latter words she spoke beneath her breath,
And as she paus'd a pallor, like to death,
Came o'er her cheek. There seem'd to surge to her
The far-off sound of some sea-sepulchre,
The thud of waters, and the thrill of tides
In lonely haunts, where Ocean over-rides
Her ghastly wrecks.

She swoon'd into herself,
With eyes out-staring to a broken shelf
Of piled-up cloud, on which the sun had smiled ;
And then, with feverous haste, she seiz'd the child
Forth from its couch among the flow'rets fair,
And bore it seaward, and was quickly there
In that same nook whereof she wrote the name,—

The Witches' Cave,—the landmark of a shame
She lov'd more dearly when the worst was known
Than halcyon bards, or kings upon a throne,
Love their dominions ; and within the niche,
All poor with weeds, she placed the jewel rich
Whereof she spake.

The child into a trance
Of loveliest sleep had fall'n ; and now, askance
She gazed upon it, as she wrapp'd it round
In her red scarf, and laid a packet bound
With golden thread beside it ; and, with tears,
Kiss'd it in silence,—lest the dimpled fears,
Still hush'd in slumber, should awake to pry
And thwart her purpose.

Sweet indeed to die,
To save from drowning, or to snatch from fire
This life-long treasure ; but, in penance dire,
To leave it thus ? To thrust it on its sire,
And then to shun it ? And for what ? A dream,—
A chance,—a hope,—a certitude,—a beam

"Take Thou my soul; absolve me of my sin,
And make me fit to join, when I am gone,
The ranks of those who wait, unfrown'd upon,
In deathful shades, in hope to reconcile
Their clamorous past with Thine eternal smile!"
Therewith she looked to shoreward, and awhile
Shed tears that scathed her, as they struggled
through

Their eyelids' fringe; and, for a space or two,
Paused there inert. "I will be brave," she said,
And journey'd on, "I will confront the dead,
In true-love fashion! I will smile to-day,
And sing the songs of madness born in May,
The mirth of madness when the world was young,
And flower and field and ford had found a tongue;
And each created thing had tuned its voice
To praise its Maker. For I die by choice.
I go to meet the ghosts of my despairs,
My murder'd hopes, my unregarded cares!
No man has wrought my death!—no woman's guile
Has sear'd my soul." And with a kind of smile

That twitch'd her mouth, and sadden'd all her face,
She sang a song of Death's abiding-place,—
A song of sorrow which, in days gone by,
Her lute had thrill'd to,—sigh with cadence-sigh
New knit in chorus. But to-day the sea,
The wind-struck sea, made all its chords agree
With that one rapture ; and the sounds thereof
Were sad to hear as sighs that wait on love.

SONG.

I.

THERE is a land beyond the rising moon,
A land of glory which the angels know ;—
A floating wonder, like a dream of June,—
And I will seek it in mine ocean-swoon.

II.

A white sea-bird, a sea-gull overhead,
May chirp at me, and twit me with a doubt,
But I shall smile upon my foamy bed,
While wind and wave will know that I am dead.

III.

The sun, all day, will see me where I go,
And, one by one, the stars will peep at me,
And each and all will find me fair as snow,
Though weird and wild with wandering to and fro.

By this the water, bubbling to her knees,
Broke into ripples, which the venturous breeze
Edged as with lace, so dainty was the foam.
A wintry wind had comb'd it like a comb ;
But this light breeze, careering o'er the spray,
Turn'd it to silver 'mid the roundelay
Of that lone creature on her foam-ward way.

SONG.

I.

O LOVE, my Master, mine Anointed One,
O thou to whom my thoughts, to-day, are turn'd,
Behold ! I stand with all my cravings done,
And all my fevers quench'd beneath the sun.

II.

I am not mad. I am not what I seem ;
For there are those in heaven who know the truth.
I hear the shouts of men, as in a dream,
And, far away, the sea-bird's sudden scream.

III.

I am the wicked rose that lov'd the Dark,
And lost its color, and its blushing power,
And all its right of kinship to the lark !
I am the night-wind's, and I bear its mark.

But now the water,—clamoring to the ends
Of her long hair,—appear'd to make amends
For recent calm ; and lash'd her on the side.
It was the buffet of the turning tide,
The full tide, ebbing now, that sought the sea,
As late the land was sought,—a moment's glee
Whipp'd into foam. But, unaffray'd at this,

She smiled and said :—" It was an ocean-kiss,
This, and no more." And, with an aching heart,
She sang, with fervor that was once a part
Of her stage life,—by men remembered well,—
The silvery sadness of her ocean-knell.

SONG.

I.

O SWEET my Son ! my darling ! dead to me,
But saved for him, as flowers are saved for
God ;
A fairy fête-day will thy finding be
When this my voice is silent in the sea.

II.

Thou art the one sweet thing on all the earth,
The seasons' joy, the summer's tender grace ;
A glimpse of Heaven, a glory from thy birth,
Unpeer'd in sleep, unparagon'd in mirth.

III.

Had I a thousand lives instead of one,
A thousand deaths to die to cancel thine,
I'd yield them all, aye ! gladly as a nun
Gives all she hath for great Jehovah's son.

Then, rapture-fraught, with wildly streaming hair,
She flung these notes ecstatic through the air.

SONG.

I.

THIS is the end of all my many fears,
And this the charter of my right to die,—
To find a haven, now, for all my fears,
And kill the scandal of my twenty years.

II.

This is my penance, this ! and my delight,
To sail the deep for searching of a tomb,—
To count the stars with mine unseeing sight !

Up to the waist she stood in that expanse
Of wan sea-water, piteous in her glance,
And weary-limb'd, and shuddering to the soul ;
For, far away, she eyed the ocean-goal
Whereto she thirsted with a quivering lip,—
The straight sea-line whereon a sudden ship
E'en now appear'd with homeward-sailing men ;
And all the blood within her falter'd then.
“ Shall I go back,” she thought, “ and claim my boy,
And dare the worst of all the world's annoy,
And front his father, and confide in him ?
Shall I do this, and turn me from the rim
Of this dark wave, now bearing full on me,
And seek a dwelling far from any sea,—
Unknown to him ? ”

She stagger'd from the wave
That reel'd about her like a rolling grave,
And swerv'd aside to give it passage clear.
“ O God ! ” she mused, half palsied in her fear,
“ I have o'erstepp'd my doom ; and now for this

I shall be tumbled in the seething hiss
Of tides tumultuous, and a Nothing be,
A wide-eyed Nothing on the doubtful sea !”
Therewith she met the breakers' dark advance
Which seem'd to tilt and tower at her, askance.
And one of these assail'd her with the shocks
Of foam-fed wrath, and hurl'd her at the rocks
And dragg'd her forth, low-gurgling in the strain
Of imminent death, and roar'd at her amain ;
And made more havoc of her shining hair
Than lovers' hands which murder while they spare :
Wild, wanton hands of wooers like the one
For whom, to-day, unkiss'd beneath the sun,
She fronted Fate. A lily in a stream
Might do as much,—a love-bird in a beam
Of mid-day light might thus resist a storm !
The curl'd-up waves o'er-canopied her form
And then submerged her. But she rose anew,
Prone on her back, aghast, and pale of hue,
And out to sea,—a lifeless thing, and mild,

With oozing lips, and eyes that ever smiled
She slowly drifted,—soon to face the stars,
And soon to front the moon athwart the bars
Of feathery cloud and opal-tinted mist ;—
But nevermore on earth should she be kiss'd,
And nevermore be touch'd by baby-hands,
And nevermore be seen in any lands !

Meantime the child within the lonely cave
Lay lock'd in slumber, spared by wind and wave,
And snugly-housed as eaglets in the bliss
Of nested thrall, though near a precipice,
Or rock-suspended in an Alpine wood.
And lo ! at entrance of the cave there stood
A silent man, with white and wistful face,
Who seem'd to know the secrets of the place
And all the hopes which lit it, lantern-wise.

He paused an instant, and, with eager eyes,
Peer'd in the grot, but saw no woman there,
Only the child, which gave him stare for stare,
And clench'd its fist, new-waken'd out of sleep ;

And more than wealth, that is the bane of youth,
When, canker-like, it makes a lie a truth,
And truth a lie, and hope a thing morose.
I am not brave ; and yet, if one so close
To Death's domain may dare to speak of Life,
I know not fear. I am the Ocean's wife.
I am the wife of every wanton wave
That cares to touch me, though it may not save.
Yet hear, oh, hear my plea ! My time will come.
This baby-voice will speak when I am dumb,
This baby-face entreat thee, with a smile,
To think of me, and pray for me the while,
As one enduring things that will endure.
And, O my Love ! of this, at least be sure :—
I love thee still,—for I will call thee mine
One minute more ! The place beyond the brine,
The place that I shall know when I am dead,
Will not affright me when my breath is sped.
And lo ! I ask thy pardon ere I die.
Meekly I crave it. For I made reply

In words unseemly ; and I pray thee now
Forget, forgive ! All wrongs I disallow ;
Yea, all my griefs, and all the blame thereof,
And all the pangs that seem'd to wait on love.
Oh, heed me, Rupert ! Heed me, and, to-day
Let me be glad, and cast my doubts away
As all unfit to share my dreams of thee.
And do thou pause ere thou condemn in me
The headlong fault which drives me to the sea,
Therein to find oblivion. Is't a sin ?
If so, God help me ! Is't a fury-din
Of mere mad waves, and no assured repose
Beyond all these ? I know not ; for the shows
Of life and death and darkness touch me not,
As they did touch me ere I trod the spot
Of our first meeting. But I yearn at last
To this one hope,—new-looming from the past,—
That thou'lt remove all scandal from my boy,
When by my death I rid thee of annoy
Henceforth for ever ! He will win his peace

And thou thy comfort ; and, till summers cease,
And winters weary of their woful chace,
He will be thine. Oh ! when he grows apace
Let him be shown the picture of my face,
The face I wore when I was lov'd of thee,
And say I died, unhurt, beside the sea,
Not in the sea itself,—'twould injure him
To know too much ! In cloisters cold and dim
Let students frown, but let the wise be gay !
I want my boy to laugh from day to day,
And smile at Fear, and torture not himself
With anxious thoughts. And yet, to bring him pelf,
I die unblest, unpray'd-for, in the flash
Of one wild moment ! If the deed be rash,
I do't in pity,—not uncom'fortèd ;
For God, they say, protects when one is dead
One's only child ! And Thou ? Forgive me, Dear !
And love my boy,—when I'm no longer here. . . .
Aye, tell him, Rupert ! tell him that I died
A natural death,—and bless'd thee like a bride,

And call'd on God to guard thee evermore !”

A shuddering sob convuls'd him to the core
At these last words. “My wife ! my winsome
wife !

Mine and not mine ! My wife !” and then, at strife
With his own grief, he fell before the child,
And clasp'd and kiss'd him, and, in accents mild,
Call'd him his angel, his predestined one,
And bore him out triumphant to the sun,
And still'd his cries by clamoring to the blast :
“Come back ! Come back !” and turn'd a face aghast
To that old crone, who jabber'd on the sands,
And made obeisance, and, with jerk'd up hands,
Pointed to Heaven.

And what the further tale
Of all this woe ? And what the legend pale
Of this contrition ? Day by day, for weeks,
The wifeless man, with sad and sunken cheeks,
Sail'd o'er the deep, and sought, in silent bays,

And lonely creeks, the wooed and wish'd for gaze
Of stranded Gladys ; but he gain'd thereby
Naught but remorse, and shame that cannot die,—
Shame and despair and blistering of the soul
Burnt through by vice,—as though a burning coal
Had dropt therein. He was the fool of Time
And,—like a man for whom in every chime
Outrings a knell,—he quaff'd the wine of hope
And found it poison ; and his thoughts did grope
In undug graves.

On earth, and on the sea,
No man, was found on foot, or on his knee,
At home,—abroad,—in sanctum or in pit
Of lowliest labour, so untimely knit
To thoughts of dole ; and still the large-eyed corse
Veer'd out to sea, as blind as his remorse,—
As deaf as danger, and as stiff and cold
As lopp'd-off limbs of trees upon the mould.
Yet was she hallow'd by the nights and days
Of heavenward calm, and redden'd by the rays

Of pitying suns, and look'd at, after dark,
By Lady Dian in her crescent-bark.
Yea ! she was cradled, for a week and more,
On Ocean's breast, and then, amid the roar
Of waves up-shuddering to the star-lit skies,
Torn down in wrack, where Silence underlies
All hopes of Man, all cravings of the sod,
This side the sanctum of the joys of God !

A CHORAL ODE TO LIBERTY.



I.

O SUNLIKE Liberty, with eyes of flame,
Mother and maid, immortal, man's Delight !
Fairest and first art thou in name and fame,
And none shall rob thee of thine ancient
right.
No, none shall taunt thee, none shall drag thee
down,
Or vex thy calmness with a coward frown,
Or kill in thee the pride that men shall take,
O glad-eyed Freedom ! for thine honor's sake.

II.

Old as the sun art thou, and young as morn,
And fresh as April when the breezes blow,
And girt with glory, like the growing corn,
And undefiled like mountains made of snow.
Where is the man, though fifty times a King,
Can stay the tide, or countermand the spring ?
And where is he, though fifty times a knave,
Can track thy steps to cast thee in a grave ?

III.

Thou art the summer of the souls of men,
And where thou shinest, where thy feet have been,
Honor abides ; and Faith,—with eagle ken,—
Surveys the landmarks of the life terrene :
Beauty, and truth, and love without a flaw !
And poor men's rights, so long denied by law,
Are made self-certain as the sun at noon,
And fair to view as flowers that grow in June.

IV.

I long have sought thee, Freedom ! as a guide,
And, like a lover I have knelt to thee,
And sung thee songs at morn and eventide,
To show to men the joy that filleth me.
I have done this in evil times and good,
And blessed the grass wherein thy feet have
stood,
And loved the sword, by which, in years
gone by,
Thou didst prevail o'er those who bade thee die.

V.

O sunlike Liberty, with eyes of flame,
Mother and maid, immortal, stern of vow !
Fairest and first art thou in name and fame,
And thou shalt wear the lightnings on thy
brow !

VI.

Thou art the welkin's smile when earth is dark—
The face of God reflected in the sea—
The land's acclaim uplifted by the lark
To ring the raptures of the just and free.
Thou art all this and more ; thou art the goal
Of earth's elected ones from pole to pole,
The lute-string's voice, the world's primeval fire,
And each man's hope, and every man's desire.

VII.

Who then condemns thee with the puny breath
Of one poor life, O thou untouched of Fate !
Who seeks to lure thee to a felon's death,
And thou so splendid and so love-estate ?
Who dares do this and live ? Who dares assail
Thy star-kissed forehead, pure and marble-pale ;
And thou so self-possessed 'mid all the stir,
And like to Pallas born of Mulciber ?

VIII.

Oh ! I have seen the sun, at setting-time,
Peep o'er the hills, as if to say good-bye ;
And I have hail'd it with the sudden rhyme
Of some new thought, full freighted with a sigh.
And I have mused : E'en thus may Freedom fall,
And darkness shroud it like a wintry pall.
But where is he—what man, alive or dead,
Has seen contempt descend on Freedom's head ?

IX.

There is no fall for thee, there is no tomb ;
And none shall stab thee, none shall stay thy hand.
Thy face is fair with love's eternal bloom,
And thou shalt have all things at thy command.
A tomb for thee ? Aye, when the sun is slain,
And lamps and fires make daylight on the plain—
Then may'st thou die, O Freedom ! and for thee
A grave be found in rocks beneath the sea.

X.

O sunlike Liberty, with eyes of flame,
Mother and maid, immortal, unsurpassed !
Fairest and first art thou in name and fame,
And thou shalt rule the sea-girt world at last !

XI.

There shall be feasting and a sound of song
In thy great cities ; and a voice divine
Shall speak of freedom all the winter long,
And fill the winds with rapture as with
wine ;
And spring shall hear it, spring shall hear the
sound,
And summer waft it o'er the flowerful ground,
And autumn shake for joy her withered leaves,
On festal morns and star-bespangled eves.

XII.

Thou wast the one good thing belov'd of Him
Whose ears were quicken'd to the sense of sight,
Whose blinded eyes beheld the seraphim
Beyond the shadows of the shores of night ;
Who lived, and loved, and prayed as prays a child,
Because, though learnèd, he was unbeguiled
By man's poor logic,—and could turn his eyes
To view the paths of our Lost Paradise.

XIII.

O thou desired of men ! O thou supreme
And true-toned Spirit, fair and far-renowned !
At times thou com'st in likeness of a dream ;
But, dream or truth, thy place is holy ground.
Vision or fact, thy form is still the first
Of all God's creatures whom thy foes have curs'd.
For Death shall die, full sure ; and in his place
His sister, Life, uplift her blameless face.

XIV.

The days and nights, with all their daughters
fair,

And all their sons, the latest-born of Time—
The golden hours that tintinnate in air—
Shall sing thee songs as soft as wedding-
chime.

And bards who note them—bards who heed the
words—

Will think the stillness all alive with birds ;
And reproduce, in strains that cannot die,
The new-found nothings of the earth and sky.

XV.

O sunlike Liberty, with eyes of flame,
Mother and maid, immortal, pure of tongue !
Fairest and first art thou in name and fame,
And thou shalt thrill the hearts of old and
young !

XVI.

Who loves thee not is traitor to himself ;
 Traitor is he to God and to the grave,
Poor as a miser with his load of pelf,
 And more unstable than a leeward wave.
Cursèd is he for aye, and he shall be
A name of shame from sea to furthest sea,
A name of scorn to all men under sun,
Whose upright souls have learnt to loathe this one.

XVII.

Thy heroes serve thee for thy love alone ;
 Honor is theirs,—in thee they put their trust.
The deeds they do shall live from zone to zone,
 When tyrants' tombs are trampled in the dust.
No ! not the mists of earth,—and not the host
Of marshall'd worlds that guard the Silent Coast—
Not all the storms of night, though night be black,
Can keep the grandeurs of the Morning back !

XVIII.

Look where, erect and tall, thy symbol waits *—
The gift of France to friends beyond the deep—
A lofty presence at the ocean-gates,
With lips of peace, and eyes that cannot weep.
A new-born Tellus, with uplifted arm,
To light the seas, and keep the land from harm,
To light the coast at downfall of the day,
And dower with dawn the darkening water-way.

XIX.

Thou hast no peer in all the shining globe,
And none to cope with thee in face or form,
And none to match thine ampleness of robe—
Nothing to stand so high above a storm.
Not the majestic thing that years ago
O'ershadowed Rhodes, and not the sculptured snow
Of ten times ten white statues can compare
With this thy semblance on the seaward air.

* Bartholdi's Statue of Liberty in New York Harbour.

XX.

O sunlike Liberty, with eyes of flame,
Mother and maid, immortal, unconfined !
Fairest and first art thou in name and fame,
And thou shalt speed more swiftly than the
wind!

XXI.

What though for ages thou hast dwelt apart,
And lived unlov'd, unheralded of men,
With tears that burn while they relieve the
heart ?

Thou hast survived all this ; and sword and
pen
Have done thee service, landward and by sea.
And slave importers have been foiled by thee,
And slaves, down-trodden, have been taught to
stand
Lords of themselves in each chivàlrous land.

XXII.

Yes ! thou hast lived in exile many days,
And men have mocked thee for thy poor estate,
And called thee vile, and torn away the bays
From off thy forehead with a scowl of hate.
Thou hast been threaten'd with a thousand things,
The shame that maddens and the blame that stings,
And all the tortures that await at times
The trapp'd assassin, with his coil of crimes.

XXIII.

Thou hast been jeer'd at for the maiden snow
Of thy white raiment and thy beauty's sake.
Gordon the True was slain to work thee woe
And wound the cause which centuries could not
shake.
To serve this end was Nelson's name belied,
And Lincoln murder'd in his place of pride.
Tyrants and mobs have wrong'd thee, many a one,
But thou hast pass'd them, and hast bow'd to none.

XXIV.

A thousand times, O Freedom ! have I turn'd
To thy rapt face, and wished that unto thee
I, too, might bring some glory, such as burn'd
In Gordon's eyes, divine, and fair to see.
Ah, God ! How grand it were to give thee
life,
To aid thy cause, self-sinking, in the strife,
Loving thee best, O Freedom ! and, in tears,
Giving thee thanks for death-accepted years.

XXV.

O sunlike Liberty, with eyes of flame,
Mother and maid, immortal, prompt of
thought !
Fairest and first art thou in name and fame,
And thou shalt lash the storm till it be
naught !

XXVI.

O pure and proud ! O gentle and sublime !

For thee and thine, O Freedom ! O my Joy !

For thee, Celestial ! on the shores of time

A throne is built which no man shall destroy.

Thou shalt be seen for miles and miles around,

And wield a sceptre, though of none be crown'd.

The waves shall know thee, and the winds of Heaven

Shall sing thee songs with mix'd and mighty steven.

XXVII.

The leaguèd fleets and armies of the law,

The direful things that once were tools of hate,

Shall serve, ere long, to keep thy name in awe,

And then collapse, as old and out of date.

Yea ! this shall be ; for God has willed it so ;

And none shall touch thy flag, to lay it low ;

And none shall rend thy robe that is to thee

As day to dawn, as sunlight to the sea.

XXVIII.

When tyrants rob thee of thy vested right,
O clear-eyed Liberty ! whom God will save,
When they do this, in fear, and fraud, and spite,
And when they circumvent the just and brave,
Oh ! then we hate them, and our hate is deep.
We curse them waking, watchful, and in sleep ;
In all the circuit of their sin's desire
We curse the curse that clothes them like a fire.

XXIX.

Oh ! thou art fearful, though so grand of soul,
Fearful and fearless, and a friend of men.
The haughtiest kings shall bow to thy control,
And rich and poor accept thy guidance then.
The kings and queens—the great ones of the earth,
Who urge allegiance by the test of birth—
When these are true to thee we wish them well,
But when they're false their place is down in hell.

xxx.

O sunlike Liberty, with eyes of flame,
Mother and maid, immortal, keen of sight !
Fairest and first art thou in name and fame,
And thou shalt tread the tempest in the night !

xxxI.

Creation's Lord alone is lord of thee ;
For all the systems, like a turning wheel,
Turn at His touch. He made the land and sea,
And found them good, and seal'd them with His
seal.
The sun, at setting, is the seal thereof,
The seal and cypher of His perfect love.
And lo ! at night His hand extended lies,
And in His palm He holds the flaming skies.

XXXII.

Though all so frail we see the dust of stars—
The dust and crust of worlds that shall be sent
Round and complete, and fleet and fair as Mars,
Through all the outlets of the firmament.
And down the crater of the seething West,
And up beyond the Morning's phoenix-nest,
We see, by faith, the outposts of the place
Where saints and seraphs view the Maker's face.

XXXIII.

He gave us Thee. We thank him for the gift,
The praise whereof is tempered, now, with tears.
But, each and all, our thoughts we will uplift
To sing the splendors of the coming years.
Who doubts the daylight when he sees afar
The fading lamp of some night-weary star,
Which, prophet-like, has heard amid the dark
The first faint prelude of the nested lark?

xxxiv.

O Freedom ! O thou grand and gracious thing !
For love of thee all seas and every shore,
And all domains whereof the poets sing,
Are link'd to man's requirements evermore.
And there shall be full soon, from north to south,
From east to west, by wisdom's word of mouth,
One code of laws that all shall understand ;
And all the world shall be one Fatherland.

xxxv.

O sunlike Liberty, with eyes of flame,
Mother and maid, immortal, sweet of breath !
Fairest and first art thou in name and fame,
And thou shalt pluck Redemption out of Death !

THE NIGHTINGALES.



I.

NATURE and night and silence how divine !
As in the west the sunset, like a sign,
Throbs through the dark, and swoons away in red
Fray'd out with gold. And lo ! from overhead
 A curtain'd mist that hides in ecstasy
The sky-blue stillness of the day that's dead.

II.

The hours are pale. The sun has travell'd on
To reach the boundaries of to-morrow's dawn ;
And from the copse a rhapsody is heard,
As of the under-talk of bird with bird,—
 The deep-set tones of unwed nightingales
Who seek the clue to Love's transcendent word.

III.

Yes, there is peace in Heaven, and joy and truth.
Sing of these things, ye troubadours of youth !
And sound to-night the watchword of the same.
Ye come to sanctify, in beauty's name,
 The ways and wants and witcheries of the woods;
And all your songs are fretted as with flame.

IV.

O ye delicious birds ! I love ye well.
Ye ring your changes like a wedding bell ;
Making such clamor on the quivering air
With such exuberance of ecstatic fare
 That flowers and trees absorb the taste thereof ;
And Echo sobs, heart-wounded in her prayer.

V.

Ye are the wingèd words of poets slain,
The souls of lovers come to earth again,—
The dear, dead spirits of the deathless past
Whose life was love, whose love was overcast
 By dim forebodings of the end of things,
Whereof the joys were all too wild to last.

VI.

Or have ye sinn'd, dear warblers ! as at night
The rose may sin, the rose and lily white
Each kiss'd in turn ? A bird is but a flower
With song for scent. Have ye from out a bower
Enticed a pixy ? Wrong'd a carrier-moth ?
Or hurt a glow-worm in its trysting hour ?

VII.

What is't ye seek ? A chance ? A thing of peace ?
A pent-up rapture from the realms of Greece ?
A dream ? A trust ? A something undefined
That seems to come like madness up the wind ?
If this be so, ah, God ! if this be so,
There may be hope for mine unsolaced mind.

VIII.

I love a maid, ye sprites ! a maid of earth,
Endow'd so rarely, and of so much worth,—
And such content,—that all who meet her say,
She is the symbol of a summer's day.

She is my queen, and I will bow to her,
And crown her with a crownlet of the May !

IX.

Ah ! now the rounded moon looks o'er the grove ;
And, like the bowl that Vulcan held to Jove,—
The turn'd-up bowl whereof the wine was spilt,—
She doth survey the world in all its guilt,

And all the sweet sad bliss of all its tears,
And all the hope on which our faith is built.

X.

Sing on ! sing on uncheck'd, ye clamorous things,
With hearts on fire, and moonlight on your wings,
But have a care lest ye should now proclaim
Some life-long doubt,—or trill my Lady's name

Right through the wood,—for then the fauns
might hear,
And boastful Pan might cheapen her sweet fame !

XI.

A whole cascade of notes ye seem to toss
From your full throats, as if to drown a loss,—
As if to make amends for something will'd
But not perform'd,—an ecstasy distill'd

From Dian's tears, or lovers' lonely sighs,
Or cups of nectar which the gods have fill'd.

XII.

If sounds were sights, I'd say, to hear ye sing,
That these are pictures which to-night ye fling
Straight down the dusk in shakes which never tire:—
Sobs turn'd to flame and quick roulades of fire,
 And vocal webs to catch delusions in,
And sparks of song which break while they aspire.

XIII.

I may be wrong,—I may misjudge ye now,—
I may confound a cadence with a vow
Not meant for Heaven. But in your chant I hear
A something Sapphic,—something like a cheer
 From hordes of Bacchus when, at twilight hour,
The Oreads faced them in their mad career.

XIV.

What is your quest? Redemption, or a boon?
A west-wind guerdon, or a mirror'd moon
In some cool lake? Of Athens do ye sing,
Or bright Sorrento, where the sun is king
 All through the year, and where, if Eros wills,
My Love and I will journey ere the spring?

xv.

Seek ye the clue to some untold romance,
A lover's idyl, or a poet's glance
In far-off Smyrna, where the myrtles bloom ?
Ye seem to make orations o'er the tomb
Of some dead fairy. Was she married well ?
Who kiss'd her first ? Who compass'd her poor
doom ?

xvi.

Unnamed, unnameable, enthroned Despair
Broods o'er the place, and daunts me unaware,
And half enthrals me with a sense, too brief,
Of awful wonder, which is kin to grief,—
Yet is not sorrow. There is joy in tears ;
But no content can come of Unbelief.

xvii.

Oh, cease, sweet birds ! Oh, cease to thrill the night
With such weird fancies link'd with such delight.
I have been drugg'd with moonbeams, and the hour
Is danger-tipp'd ! Ye have, methinks, a power
Not meant for solace, and my soul is touch'd
As with the fragrance of an opium-flower.

XVIII.

If ye are here to sing yourselves to death,
Let it be known ; and let the languid breath
Of some sirocco make your meanings clear.
Tell me what joy, from flowering year to year,
 Makes ye so mad ; and teach me, ere I go,
How best to pray for Her whom I revere !

MEDUSA'S HAIR.



I.

Who own'd it first ?

Who, first of all, unthinking in his sleep,
Caress'd this token which I will not keep ?
Behold ! I deem it loathsome and accurst.

II.

A charm, a snare !

A net-work, aye, a woof it seems to me.
For there are syrens, still, by land and sea,
Who catch us, shuddering, in a web of hair.

III.

See ! it is black,

Aye, black as night itself, or vulture's plume.
I deem it hateful, and of evil doom,—
Yet I will kiss it ere I give it back.

IV.

O hideous coil !
O serpent twisted from a Gorgon's head !
Thou art the token of a prayer unsaid,
A vow unutter'd which I will not soil.

V.

Thou art a chain ;
A dead thing, thou ! albeit alive in spring.
Thy jagged points offend me like a sting,
And thou canst fret me till I feel the pain.

VI.

I dare not say
How wildly, O thou snake ! thou didst embrace
Me and thy dame, up-curling in my face ;
And how I lov'd thee many a spendrift day.

VII.

'Twas long ago :
A week or more,—what matters ? It is past.
In sooth I know, thou thing ! who kiss'd thee last,
But who will kiss thee next I shall not know.

VIII.

She was not fair,—
She was not dark,—this woman whom I knew.
Her lips had something of the coral's hue,
And she was beauteous in the summer air.

IX.

Oh ! could we see,
Could we but see deception in an eye,
And say : This face is good, and this will lie,
And this, though seeming-true, will perjured be !

X.

But hearts are mute ;
And few can read the thoughts that, out of sight,
Lurk in the mind. And I, in my despite,
I muse thereon, low-leaning o'er my lute.

XI.

I weep at times,—
I weep hot tears, and, like a child, am driven
Back from the brink of death to dream of heaven ;
And hope and doubt commingle in my rhymes.

XII.

I scarce can tell,—
I scarce can dream indeed,—why this should be,
Or why a lock of hair should anger me,
Or why remorse should rend me as in hell.

XIII.

Yet this is sweet,
This thought, at least, which I will not forego :
The coil'd-up tress,—the symbol of my woe,—
Is powerless now and stingless at my feet.

XIV.

Oh ! hence, thou snake,
Thou twisted thing too base to be alive,
Begone, thou traitor, to thy Gorgon hive,
That men may loathe thee for thy lady's sake !

THE KING'S REST.



I.

HERE lies the King, within his tomb,—a shrine for
men to cherish -

The landmark of a nation's love, whose fame will
never perish,—

Our Shakespeare's Rest !—the grave of him whom
all were proud to follow,

Because he join'd to Plato's brain the frenzies of
Apollo.

II.

Aye, there he lies on English soil, the chief of all
the singers,
Highest and best in honor's quest among the
passion-bringers.
And o'er the stone a warning word, as if, in kingly
sorrow,
He had foreseen the vulgar touch of some demented
Morrow.

III.

So many boons he left us here, so many golden
verses,
That, had he curs'd us once a year, we might have
borne his curses.
But he was just. He curs'd but once, as to the
grave he wended :—
"Accurst be he who moves my bones !" and there
the fury ended.

IV.

Oh ! he was great and wise as Fate, and, by the
pen he wielded,—
Yea, by the pen that was his sword,—he lov'd the
cause he shielded.
He lov'd the children at the knee, the maiden and
the mother,
And all who toil by land and sea, and all who help
each other.

V.

He found that as the years declined,—as one by
one they vanish'd,—
The earth was robb'd of many joys, and Chivalry
was banish'd.
And so, to dower the world again,—to fill the
place vacated,—
He throng'd the air with ecstacies which he alone
created.

VI.

He built a palace out of nought, for Love to come
and win it,—

A dome of pride and pageantry, and only breath
within it.

But when he touch'd it with his hand, behold !
from out the portal,

A thousand goodly shapes advanced,—and they were
all immortal.

VII.

These are the men we know to-day, the friends we
cannot sever,

Women and men of Shakspeare's pen who live with
us for ever.

We may forget the present hour, and facts around
it clinging,

But not the grand eternities of his emphatic
singing.

VIII.

And when he doff'd his robe of clay, to prove
amid the dying,
That death was meant for meaner men, and not for
his descrying,
At least he earn'd the common right which others,
still, have taken,
To turn his face to mother earth, belov'd, and not
forsaken.

IX.

He cannot die, but he has pass'd to Nature's holy
keeping,
Happy in sleep below the sod, and guarded in his
sleeping.
Oh ! peace be his, by night and day,—his spirit
with the Giver,—
His dust within the Land he lov'd, beside the
rolling river !

VOX AMORIS.



I.

VOUCHSAFE, my Lady ! by the passion-flower,
And by the glamor of a moonlight hour,
And by the cries and sighs of all the birds
That sing o' nights, to heed again the words
Of my poor pleading ! for I swear to thee
My love is deeper than the bounding sea,
 And more conclusive than a wedding bell,
And freer-voiced than winds upon the lea.

II.

In all the world, from east unto the west,
There is no vantage-ground, and little rest,
And no content for me, from dawn to dark,
From set of sun to songtime of the lark,
And yet, withal, there is no man alive
Who, for a goodly cause, to make it thrive,
 Would do such deeds as I would gird me to,
Could I but win the pearl for which I dive.

III.

It is thy love which, downward in the deep
Of far-off visions, I behold in sleep,—
It is thy pearl of love which, in the night,
Doth tempt my soul to hopes I dare not write,—
It is this gem for which, had I a crown,
I'd barter peace and pomp and ermined gown,—
 It is thy troth, thou paragon of maids !
For which I'd sell the joys of all renown.

IV.

I would attack a panther in its den,
To do thee service as thy man of men,
Or front the Fates, or, like a ghoul confer
With staring ghosts outside a sepulchre.
I would forego a limb to give thee life,
And yield my soul itself in any strife,
 In any coil of doubt, in any spot,
Where Death and Danger meet as man and wife.

V.

It is my solace, all my nights and days,
To pray for thee and dote on thee always,
And evermore to count myself a king,
Because I earn'd thy favor in the spring.
Oh, smile on me, and call me to thy side,
And I will kneel to thee as to a bride,
 And yet adore thee as a saint in Heaven,
By God ordain'd, by good men glorified !

VI.

I will acquaint thee with mine inmost thought,
And teach thee all I know, though unbesought,
And make thee prouder of a poet's dream
Than wealthy men are proud of what they seem.
If thou have trust therein, if thou require
Service of me, or song, or penance dire,
 I will obey thee as thy belted knight,
Or die to satisfy thy heart's desire.

VII.

Ah ! thou hast that in store which none can give,
None but thyself ; and I am fain to live
To watch the outcome of so fair a gift,—
To see the bright good-morrow loom, and lift,—
To know that thou,—unpeer'd beneath the moon,—
Untamed of men,—untutor'd to the tune
 Of lip with lip,—wilt cease thy coy disdain,—
And learn the languors of the loves of June.

VIII.

All that I am, and all I hope to be,
Is thine till death ; and though I die for thee
Each day I live, and though I throb and thrill
At each returning touch, for good or ill,
Of my dark hour, I revel in the same.
Yet I am free of hope, as thou of blame ;
 And all around thee, wakeful and in sleep,
I weave a blessing for thy soul to claim.

IX.

Oh, by thy radiant hair, and by the glow
Of thy full eyes,—and by thy breast of snow,—
And by the buds thereof that have the flush
Of infant roses when they strive to blush,—
And by thy voice, melodious as a bell
That rings for prayer in God's own citadel,—
 By all these things, and more than I can urge,
I charge thee, Sweet ! to let me out of hell !

X.

Is it not hell to live so far away,
And not to touch thee,—not, by night or day,
To be partaker of one smile of thine,
Or one commingling of thy breath and mine,
Or one encounter of thine amorous mouth ?
I dwell apart from thee, as north from south,
 As east from western ways I dwell apart,
And taste the tears that quench not any drouth.

XI.

Why wilt thou take the memory of a wrong
To be thy shadow all the summer long,—
A thing to chide thee, at the dead of night,
A thing to wake thee with the morning light
For self-upbraiding, while the wanton bird
O'er-rides the welkin ! Ah, by joy deferr'd,—
 By peace withheld from me,—do thou relent,
And dower my life, to-day, with one love-word.

XII.

Wouldst thou, Cassandra-wise, oppress my soul,
With more unrest, and, Hebe-like, the bowl
Of festal comfort for a moment raise
To my poor lips, and then avert thy gaze ?
Wouldst make me mad beyond the daily curse
Of thy displeasure, and, in wrath, disperse
That halcyon draught, that nectar of the mind,
Which is the theme I yearn to, in my verse ?

XIII.

Oh, by thy pity, when so slight a thing
As some small bird is wounded in the wing,
Avert thy scorn, and grant me, from afar,
At least the right to love thee as a star,—
The right to turn to thee, the right to bow
To thy pure name, and evermore, as now,
To own thy thralldom, and to sing thereof,
In proud allegiance to mine earliest vow.

XIV.

It were abuse of power to frown again,
When, all day long, I gloat upon the pain
Of pent-up hope, my joy and my distress,
While the remembrance of a mute caress
Given to a rose,—a rose I pluck'd for thee,—
Seems as the withering of the world to me,
Because I am unlov'd of thee to-day,
And undesired as sea-weeds in the sea.

XV.

I'll not believe that eyes so bright as thine
Were meant for malice in the summer-shine,
Or that a glance thereof, though turn'd to fire,
Could injure one whose spirit, like a lyre,
Has throb'd to music of remember'd joys,—
The pride thereof,—and all the tender poise
Of trust with trust,—the symphonies of grief
Made all mine own,—and Faith which never cloy

XVI.

How can it be that one so fair as thou
Should wear contention on a whiter brow
Than Mayday Dian's in her hunting-gear ?
I'll not believe that eyes so holy-clear,
And mouth so constant to its morning prayer,
Could mock the mischief of a man's despair,
 And all the misery of a moment's hope
Seen far away as mists are seen in air.

XVII.

How can a woman's heart be made of stone
And she not know it ? Mine is overthrown.
I have no heart to-day, no perfect one ;
Only a thing that sighs at set of sun,
And beats its cage, as if the thrall thereof
Were freedom's prison, or the tomb of love ;
 As if, God help me ! there were shame in Truth,
And no salvation left in realms above.

XVIII.

I once could laugh. I once was deem'd a man
Fit for the frenzies of the dead god Pan,
And now, by Heaven ! the birds that sing so well
Move me to tears ; and all the leafy dell,
And all the sundown glories of the west,
And all the moorland which the moon has blest,
 Make me a dreamer, aye ! a coward, too,
In all the weird expanse of mine unrest.

XIX.

It is my curse to see thee, and to learn
That I must shun thee, though I blaze and burn
With all this longing, all this fierce delight,
Fear-fraught and famish'd for a suitor's right,—
A right conceded for a moment's space,
And then withdrawn, as, amorous face to face,
 I dared to clasp thee, and to urge a troth
Too sovereign-sweet for one of Adam's race.

XX.

I am a doom-entangled, mirthless soul,
Without the power to rid me of the dole
Which, day by day, and nightly evermore,
Corrodes my peace! Oh, smile, as once before,
At each wild thought,—and each discarded plea,—
And let thy sentence, let thy suffrance be,
That I be reckon'd, till the day I die,
The sad-eyed Singer of thy fame and thee!

THE END.

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